



Office of the Superintendent
15701 E. First Ave., Suite 206
Aurora, CO 80011

Phone – 303-365-7800
Fax – 303-326-1280
Web – aurorak12.org

SENT VIA EMAIL

April 3, 2019

HOPE Online Board of Directors
c/o
Heather O'Mara
Chief Executive Officer
HOPE Online Learning Academy
373 Inverness Parkway, Suite 205
Englewood, CO 80112
Heather.Omara@hopeonline.org

Dear Ms. O'Mara,

We would like to thank you for your patience as we reviewed HOPE Online's request to enter into an MOU. Unfortunately, after having reviewed the relevant information, we have significant concerns about the best interest of our pupils, parents, community and our school district in continuing the current agreement with HOPE Online.

Specifically, based on School Performance Frameworks for elementary students, as well as, concerns and conditions expressed by HOPE's Charter Authorizer and the State Board of Education, the District finds that a continued MOU for HOPE Learning Centers within APS is not in the best interests of pupils, parents, the community and the District.

In considering HOPE Online's MOU, APS has sought and reviewed the following information:

Performance Data. APS reviewed HOPE's School Performance Frameworks since 2015. This review showed the following mixed changes in performance:

- The Elementary School continues to remain on Performance Watch and is on Year 8 of the State's Performance Watch timeline. After 8 years of Performance Watch, the Elementary school is still receiving only the minimum points on the SPF. There have been only minor improvements at the elementary level with a small improvement in growth. Additionally, the structure of the SPF and inclusion of data from grades 3-5 for proficiency and grades 4-5 for growth have historically led to elementary schools moving plan types more rapidly than other levels. HOPE is the first and only Elementary school in the State to reach Year 8 on the State's Performance Watch timeline.
- The Middle School showed improved performance by coming off Performance Watch after 6 years on the State's Accountability Clock by earning Improvement ratings in 2016-17 and sustaining that SPF rating for 2017-18, as a result of improved growth. However, the Achievement still receives the minimum points on the SPF.

- The High School, which is considered an Alternative Education Campus, showed declining performance since 2015 by falling from Performance ratings in 2016 and 2017 to an Improvement rating in 2018, as a result of declines in achievement, growth, and post-workforce readiness.

Comparison to Other APS Schools. APS also compared HOPE's performance data to APS' performance for schools in close proximity to HOPE Learning Centers. For the purposes of this review, APS specifically compared the data for HOPE's Elementary school, and did not have the data to disaggregate for the results specific to students who attend a Learning Center within the boundaries of APS.

Comparison between HOPE Online Elementary School and APS Elementary Schools in Close Proximity

School	Distance (mi) to HOPE Learning Center	2018 SPF		2018 Achievement (Scale Scores)		2018 Growth (Median Growth Percentile)	
		Plan Type	Overall	ELA	Math	ELA	Math
HOPE ES	-	Priority Improvement (Year 8)	38.9	713.7	709.2	41.0	41.0
Wheeling¹	1.7/1.6	Performance	56.8	723.5	720.9	51.5	57.0
Tollgate	1.7	Improvement	48.1	725.2	718.0	48.0	48.0
Clyde Miller¹	1.0	Performance	54.0	724.3	713.5	52.0	33.0
Jewell¹	1.3	Performance	62.4	727.2	715.1	65.5	58.0
Lyn Knoll^{1,2}	1.5	Improvement	45.3	724.8	716.4	56.0	26.0
Boston¹	0.7	Performance	52.6	705.1	712.0	36.0	46.0
Crawford¹	0.2	Improvement	48.6	708.8	715.0	48.0	51.5
Virginia Court²	1.2	Turnaround (Year 4)	27.2	713.6	704.2	90.0	27.5
Fletcher Comm¹	1.1	Improvement	46.4	708.1	710.0	46.0	55.0

Notes:

1 These six schools (Wheeling, Clyde Miller, Lyn Knoll, Boston, Crawford, and Fletcher) were identified on the State's Performance Watch timeline at some point over the past five years. However, they have all since come off of Performance Watch as a result of improved performance.

2 Lyn Knoll and Virginia Court are in close proximity to the Action Learning Center which is not located within APS boundaries, but within Cherry Creek School District.

State Board Directed Action. APS reviewed documents from the State Board of Education hearing in 2017 related to HOPE Online's Elementary School being beyond Year 5 on the State's Performance Watch timeline, as well as the Colorado Department of Education's Progress Monitoring Reports on implementation of this directed action. In May 2017, the State Board of Education directed HOPE to reconstitute its governing board and retain a management partner to lead implementation of components of its Pathways Plan.

According to CDE's most recent monitoring report and memo to the State Board from March 14, 2019, while many components of the Pathways Plan were implemented, such as reconstituting the board, providing professional development for HOPE teachers, mentors and Learning Center Directors and implementing new tools for accountability and monitoring, HOPE struggled to implement some of the key components around ensuring higher quality mentors who work with students at the Learning Centers.

HOPE will be required to appear before the State Board in the Fall of 2019 if it does not earn an SPF rating of Performance or Improvement for the Elementary School.

Douglas County Charter Renewal. APS reviewed documents related to the Douglas County Board's review and renewal of HOPE Online's charter, including a presentation by HOPE Online, staff review and recommendation regarding HOPE Online's charter renewal application, and the Board resolution granting the renewal. In January 2019, the Douglas County Board of Education renewed HOPE Online's Charter for two years consistent with staff recommendations. As a result of academic performance concerns, Douglas County's renewal imposed a condition requiring the school to earn ratings of Performance or Improvement at all levels based on the 2019-2020 school year or be subject to revocation.

Additionally, APS requested the Douglas County Board of Education present to the APS Board of Education regarding the reauthorization of HOPE Online's charter. The Douglas County Board of Education indicated that they were unavailable to appear. As we indicated in our invitation to the Douglas County Board of Education, this presentation would be a vital part of APS' review of HOPE Online's MOU request. Unfortunately, we do not have that information to consider.

Site Visit to Power Academy. I conducted a site visit to Power Academy, a HOPE Online Learning Center located within APS' boundaries. While the visit was a limited period of time, I noted a significant amount of direct instruction by mentors. This reinforces the importance of CDE's concern about HOPE's struggle to implement some of the key components of its Pathways Plan around ensuring higher quality mentors who work with students at the Learning Centers.

Meeting with Executive Director of HOPE Online. I met with HOPE Online Founder and CEO Heather O'Mara regarding the MOU.

Public Hearing. On April 2, 2019, a public hearing was held to allow HOPE Online representatives and members of the community to provide comment and information related to the HOPE Online MOU. From these comments, it is clear that HOPE Online staff and families value the community HOPE provides, however this does not translate to improved academic performance.

Based on the sum of the information available as set forth above, the District believes there is a legitimate concern that HOPE Online Learning Centers do not offer an educational opportunity that is in the best interests of the students of Aurora. As such, the APS District has determined not to enter into an MOU to allow HOPE Online to operate Learning Centers within APS boundaries.

Sincerely,



D. Rico Munn
Superintendent
Aurora Public Schools

Cc: Colorado Department of Education Office of Blended and Online learning Services
Colorado State Board of Education